DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 740 UD 027 939

TITLE	Five Million Children: A Statistical Profile of Our Poorest Young Citizens. Report Summary.
INSTITUTION	Columbia Univ., New York, NY. National Center for Children in Poverty.
PUB DATE	90
NOTE	17p.; For the full report, see UD 027 940.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	At Risk Persons; *Childhood Needs; *Child Welfare; Economically Disadvantaged; *Family Problems; *Low Income Groups; Minority Group Children; Parent Education; Poverty; Preschool Education; *Young Children
IDENTIFIERS	*Research Summaries

ABSTRACT

This document summarizes a statistical profile that focuses on the needs and problems of poor young children and their families and suggests steps to improve their lives. Information was drawn from primary and secondary analyses of statistical data from 1987. The following findings are included: (1) nearly one out of every four children under 6 years of age lives in poverty; (2) young minority group children under 6 years of age are much more likely to be poor than white children; (3) child poverty rates are highest in central cities; (4) many children are homeless because of the lack of affordable housing; (5) young children under 6 living with single mothers are much more likely to be poor than those living with two parents; (6) the parents' educational attainment is closely related to child poverty; (7) full-time employment does not guarantee that families will not be poor; (8) fewer than one-third of all poor children live in families that rely exclusively on welfare; and (9) poor young children are at risk of impaired health, school failure, dropout, delinquency, early childbearing, and adult poverty. Poor families need the following: (1) access to health and nutrition services, early childhood care and education, and affordable housing; (2) economic supports to help prevent them from becoming poor; (3) help for poor young parents to assume parenting responsibilities and prepare for employment in today's demanding labor force; and (4) welfare reform initiatives that include work with adequate pay. A four-item bibliography is appended. (FMW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

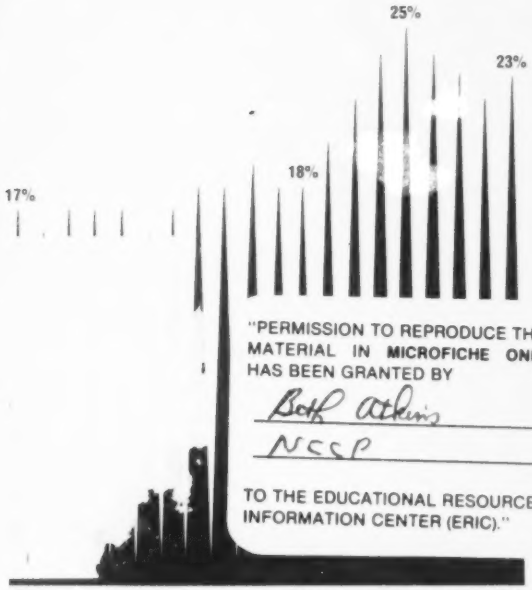
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 330740

Report Summary

Five Million Children

A Statistical Profile of Our Poorest Young Citizens



U.S. Poverty Rates for Children Under Six, 1968–1987

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Bob Atkins
NCCP
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

UO 027 434

National Center for Children in Poverty
School of Public Health
Columbia University
1990

The intention of *Five Million Children* is to bring into focus the needs and problems of poor young children and their families and to suggest steps to improve their lives. To address more effectively the needs of young children living in or near poverty, we need a firmer grasp of who these children are, what kinds of risks they face, and how adequately current policies and programs serve them.

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, approximately 32.5 million people were poor in the United States in 1987. Of that number, 13 million were children under the age of 18, and 5 million were children under six. The federal government classifies a family as poor if its pretax cash income falls below a certain minimum standard. In 1989 this standard, the poverty line, was $9,890 for a family of three, and $12,675 for a family of four. In 1987 the poverty line was $9,056 for a family of three, and $11,611 for a family of four.

The information in *Five Million Children* has been drawn from primary and secondary analyses of national databases and from published and unpublished literature. Much of the data presented is for 1987. At the time the data were being analyzed, this was the most recent information available.

Five Million Children

A Statistical Profile of Our Poorest Young Citizens

The period of childhood from birth through five years is one of great vulnerability and great opportunity.

This first report from the National Center for Children in Poverty presents a portrait of the five million children under the age of six who live in poverty in the United States. The report brings together, for the first time in one source, information on poor children under six and their families. It addresses the following questions:

Who are the nation's poor children under six, and where do they live?

What are the families of poor young children like, and why are they poor?

What risks do poor children face, and what is being done to reduce them?

What conclusions can we draw from this information to help us improve the life circumstances and developmental outcomes for poor children under six?

Excerpts from the Foreword

"We must remember that all poor families and their children are not alike. Their histories differ as much as their current life circumstances, and the program and policy responses must differ as well. What we want for our most vulnerable children is what we should want for all children—a healthy start in life; high quality early care and education; parental support systems; job market opportunities that allow parents to provide for their children emotionally and financially; and decent, affordable housing in stable, safe environments.

"It is time to view the issues of children and families in poverty through a new lens. We need to implement comprehensive approaches to assisting poor young children and families over the early years of family formation—approaches that incorporate the concepts of prevention and equity, stability and continuity, and enrichment rather than remediation.

"Greater coordination of policies and programs is essential. We need income support *and* high quality child care. We need job training *and* better housing. Single solutions are not the answer to multiple problems. Academics, legislators, educators, child advocates, corporate executives, and religious leaders have joined ranks in supporting initiatives to improve the lives of children. They believe, as do we, that children are our future, and the future is today."

Judith E. Jones
Director
National Center for Children in Poverty

Summary of Findings

Some of the findings in *Five Million Children* help to illustrate the breadth and depth of child poverty in the United States:

Nearly one out of every four children under six years of age lives in poverty.

In 1987, 23 percent of U.S. children under six were living at or below the poverty line. While the number of poor *people* in the United States has declined in recent years, the number of poor *children* under six has grown.

Children under six are more likely to be poor than any other age-group.

The 23 percent poverty rate for children under six in 1987 was higher than the rate for any other age-group in the United States. It was more than double the rate for adults aged 18–64, nearly double the rate for the elderly, and higher than the poverty rate for older children and adolescents.

While 42 percent of the 5 million children under six in 1987 were white, 58 percent were from minority groups. Minority children under six are much more likely to be poor than white children under six.

About 2.1 million, or 42 percent, of the 5 million poor children in the United States in 1987 were non-Hispanic white. About 1.6 million, or 32 percent, were non-Hispanic Black; 1 million, or 21 percent, were Hispanic; and 250,000, or 5 percent, were from other racial or ethnic minorities, predominantly Asian and Native American. The *rates* of poverty for each racial/ethnic group vary greatly. For Black children under six in 1987, the poverty rate was 48 percent. For Hispanics, the rate was 42 percent. For other minorities, the rate was 29 percent, and for whites, 13 percent.

Child poverty rates are highest in central cities, but more poor children live outside them.

In 1987 the poverty rate among children under six living in the central cities of U.S. metropolitan areas was 31 percent. The rate was 13 percent in suburban areas and 28 percent in rural areas. Child poverty is more prevalent in the South than in other regions, but it is growing fastest outside the South.

For want of affordable housing, many U.S. children are homeless.

Three national studies of homeless children aged 16 and under estimate that between 41,000 and 106,000 children are literally homeless at any given time (i.e., living in shelters, churches, or public places), and many more are precariously housed.

Children under six living with single mothers are much more likely to be poor than those living with two parents, but 38 percent of poor young children live in married-couple families.

Since 1979 there has been a gradual upward trend in the proportion of all poor children living with single mothers. By 1987, more than half of all poor children under six lived with single mothers. Children born outside of marriage living with single mothers are at the greatest risk of long-term poverty. The birthrate among teenagers has declined over the past several decades, but the proportion of births to teenagers occurring outside of marriage increased from 15 percent to 61 percent from 1960 through 1986.

Children living in large families are more likely to be poor than are children in small families. However, far fewer poor children live in large families today than did in the recent past. In 1986, 51 percent of all poor children under six lived in families with one other or no other child. The average number of related children under 18 living in poor families fell dramatically between 1970 and 1986.

The educational level of parents is closely associated with child poverty. Parents who have not completed high school are less likely than parents with more education to be employed steadily, or at all. They also tend to earn less when employed.

In 1987 the poverty rate was 62 percent for children under six living in families where the only parent or the better-educated parent had not completed high school. That same year the poverty rate was 19 percent for young children with at least one parent who had graduated from high school.

More than half of all poor children under six have at least one parent who is either working or looking for work. Even so, full-time, full-year employment does not guarantee that families will not be poor.

Among children under six in poor married-couple families, 72 percent had at least one parent employed full- or part-time. Among poor children under six in mother-only families, 20 percent had parents who were employed full- or part-time. Children whose mothers work are less likely to be poor, whether they live with one or two parents.

Fewer than one-third of all poor children under six live in families that rely exclusively on welfare.

In 1987 only 28 percent of children under six lived in families whose sole source of income was welfare. Some 16 percent lived in families who supplemented their earnings with public assistance, and 19 percent lived in families who received a mix of earned and unearned income. More than one-third, 37 percent of all poor children under six, lived in families who relied exclusively on earnings from employment.

Poor children are at greater risk of impaired health than are other children.

Poor women are more likely than nonpoor women to deliver low-birthweight babies, and their children are more likely to have growth retardation and anemia because of poor nutrition. Compared with nonpoor children, poor children are exposed to higher doses of lead in their environments, which can cause adverse central nervous system effects. There is also a high rate of accidental injury among poor children, and the risk of prenatal drug exposure and exposure to AIDS appears to be much higher for infants born to poor women.

Early childhood experiences contribute to poor children's high rates of school failure, dropout, delinquency, early childbearing, and adult poverty.

Developmental risks are significantly greater, on average, for poor than for nonpoor children. These risks vary according to the physical and mental health of parents, the availability of social support from outside the family, place of residence, the resilience of children, and other circumstances. Higher maternal education is associated with higher levels of cognitive and emotional support for child development.

Many poor parents are less able than other parents to prevent their children's exposure to harm and to promote positive health and developmental outcomes.

Many poor parents were themselves poor children, exposed to similar developmental risks and suffering similar harm. The limited ability of poor parents to fulfill their parental responsibilities comes mainly from a lack of economic resources—often exacerbated by a lack of knowledge and personal and social resources. Health care, child care, and preschool education programs are less accessible to poor parents than to nonpoor parents, resulting in less positive health and development among poor children.

Summary of Conclusions

The problem of child poverty cannot be solved without addressing the needs of poor families.

Direct and early intervention in the lives of poor children, through such services as preventive maternal and child health care and early childhood education, can improve long-term outcomes among children who grow up in poverty. However, interventions that focus exclusively on poor children cannot compensate for the impoverished environments in which they live.

Young children depend primarily on their families to protect them, to actively promote their good health and development, and to mend whatever harm occurs. Poor parents are generally less able than other parents to fulfill these responsibilities because they have fewer economic, personal, and social resources.

Poor families differ, and there is a continuum of need, depending on circumstances.

Every year large numbers of families become poor because of divorce, separation, unemployment, or temporary disability. The length of the stay in poverty for many of these families is brief, but some families suffer longer spells of poverty because of prolonged physical disability, lack of job skills and experience, extended periods of unemployment related to recessions in the national or local economy, reemployment at lower wages when the local economy loses higher-paying jobs, or other factors. Long periods of poverty, even for robust families, gradually erode personal and social resources, and the escape from poverty becomes increasingly difficult.

Other families are formed in poverty. These families generally fare worse and have greater needs than families who become poor. They include large numbers of single-parent families formed outside of marriage; a surprising number of young two-parent

families who cannot earn enough from employment to escape poverty; and many families formed by immigrant parents who arrive in the United States with few financial assets and little education.

Families formed in poverty tend to have fewer economic, personal, and social resources and to experience longer spells of poverty than other poor families. Nonetheless, even among these families, important differences are evident. Poor young two-parent families who remain intact are more likely to work their way out of poverty, over time, than are single-mother families. It appears that most children born to poor single mothers will spend their entire childhoods in poverty—barring major shifts in U.S. social and economic policy.

Much can be done to protect poor young children and to help them become productive adults. Available data strongly indicate the need for, and the value of, universal access to maternal and child health and nutrition services, high quality early childhood care and education, and more affordable and adequate housing.

• Universal health insurance coverage and improvements in the health care systems serving poor and low-income populations would make a positive difference in the life outcomes of poor children.

• Efforts to expand child care subsidies for poor and low-income families and to develop the quality of child care resources at the community level are critical both for reducing poverty and for promoting child development.

• The expansion of Head Start and other effective preschool programs to serve all poor and low-income children is long overdue, as is making these programs full-day, full-year to meet the needs of employed parents.

• New housing policy and investment must be part of any solution to the problem of child poverty.

Effective measures to prevent families from becoming poor include insurance for temporarily disabled workers, extended unemployment benefits, child support for the children of separated and divorced parents, and income supports for low-wage workers.

• A national temporary disability insurance plan providing adequate income and a bridge to long-term disability programs under Social Security would prevent many children and families from ever becoming poor.

• If social insurance benefits to the unemployed provided a secure bridge to reemployment, many families would never enter the welfare system and the ranks of the very poor. If the unemployment insurance program were coordinated with education, training, job development, and income support for workers reemployed at low wages, periods of unemployment could be shortened and decent family incomes ensured.

• A higher minimum wage, an expanded Earned Income Tax Credit adjusted for family size, or other measures in some combination could ensure that the children of parents who work for a living are not poor.

• A child support *assurance* system could guarantee reasonable levels of child support to custodial parents when the noncustodial parent is unable to pay or avoids payment.

Three key elements in any initiative to reduce the number of children born into poverty are (1) discouraging adolescents from becoming parents before they are able to assume parenting responsibilities, (2) helping poor young parents meet their children's developmental needs, and (3) preparing poor young adults for employment in the more technically demanding jobs of today's labor force.

• There is a pressing need to expand teenage pregnancy prevention and teenage parent support programs.

• There is a critical need to create educational and employment opportunities that will motivate poor teenagers to postpone parenthood.

• High quality schooling and more postsecondary education and training for technically demanding occupations are essential not only for young adults to secure employment, but for the United States to compete in the global economy.

Research indicates that the majority of welfare recipients would rather be self-supporting, assuming they could support themselves above the poverty line. Unfortunately, present welfare reform initiatives, intended to foster economic self-sufficiency, do not ensure that work will pay enough to keep people in the labor force and off welfare.

• A more comprehensive approach to welfare reform would include income supports for all employed parents and assured child support payments for single parents, together with universal family health insurance coverage and child care assistance for all low-income workers.

• Coordinated community-based services can help poor parents cope more effectively with personal problems and parental responsibilities, can make a positive difference in the face of economic hardship, and are essential to some families' ultimately achieving economic self-sufficiency.

• We must invest more in both programs and mechanisms for service coordination if we are to use our resources wisely and help those poor families who have the fewest personal and social resources.

Order Form

Cut along perforation

To order a copy of the 96-page publication *Five Million Children: A Statistical Profile of Our Poorest Young Citizens*, please fill out the information below, remove the page, and send it to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) with a check made out to "The Trustees of Columbia University." **$9.95 plus $3.00 postage and handling ($12.95 total).**

Additional publications available from NCCP are described on the next page, with specific information about book charges, postage, and handling costs.

Name

Title/Division

Organization

Address

City

State Zip code

Please send me:	No. of copies	Cost/postage
Five Million Children		$
Past Caring		
Young Children		
Changing Needs		
Alive and Well?		
	Total:	$

Checks must be made out to the Trustees of Columbia University. Mail form and check to NCCP, Columbia University, 154 Haven Avenue, NY, NY 10032.

Additional publications available: National Center for Children in Poverty

Past Caring: A History of U.S. Preschool Care and Education for the Poor, 1820–1965 by Emily D. Cahan

This volume describes America's 19th- and 20th-century infant and child care programs and education services as they responded to changing family and societal needs. The text traces the historical origins of a two-tiered child care system—one rooted in the social welfare system, with the goal of reducing welfare payments, and the second designed to give preschool educational enrichment to middle- and upper-middle-class children. 60 pp. **$5.95 plus $2.00 postage and handling.**

Young Children in Poverty: An Annotated Bibliography of Books and Reports compiled by Leigh Hallingby

This annotated bibliography initiates a series of annual Center bibliographies and supplements that categorize and describe up-to-date reports and monographs in many areas related to children in poverty, minorities, single mothers, the uninsured, social policies, welfare reform, early childhood care and education, family support, maternal and child health, Public Law 99-457, and hunger and food distribution. 20 pp. **$3.00 postage and handling.**

Changing Needs for a Changing Future: The Need for Educational Leadership by Judith E. Jones

To assure productive futures for our five million children under six who live in poverty, our school systems need to involve parents in schools, support and retrain teachers, respond to family needs and working mothers, and share decision-making with members of the community. This text, based on a speech, calls for systemic changes in our educational system in order to educate at-risk children. 20 pp. **$2.00 postage and handling.**

Forthcoming:

Alive and Well? A Review of Health Policies and Programs for Poor Children by Lorraine V. Klerman

This monograph will delineate for policymakers the extent of health problems among children in poverty, the causes of these problems, and the history of governmental health care programs for children in the United States. The final section suggests possible public approaches to provide improved health and safety for poor children. (In press.) 72 pp. **$5.95 plus $3.00 postage and handling.**

Fill out order form on page 13.

The National Center for Children in Poverty was established in 1989 at the School of Public Health, Columbia University. Its goals are to strengthen programs and policies for children and their families who live in poverty in the United States.The Center conducts interdisciplinary analyses and disseminates information about public and private initiatives in the areas of maternal and child health, family support, and early childhood care and education.

National Center for Children in Poverty

School of Public Health
Columbia University
154 Haven Avenue, New York, NY 10032
212-927-8793•FAX 212-927-9162